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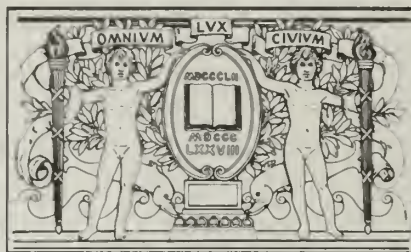
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The South End

BOSTON 200 NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY SERIES



HENRY ADAMS, the nineteenth century philosopher, said that the history of America is not the history of a few, but the history of the many. People of Boston's neighborhood accepted the challenge of Adams' statement to produce "people's histories" of their own communities. Hundreds of Bostonians formed committees in each of fifteen neighborhoods of the city, volunteering their time in the past year and a half to research in libraries, search for photographs, produce questionnaires, transcribe tapes, assist in writing and editing. Most important, act as interviewers and subjects of "oral history" research. These booklets are not traditional textbook histories, and we have attempted to cull a statistical sample. We have simply talked with our neighbors, people who remember sometimes with fondness, sometimes with regret, but always with wisdom. For each of us has his or her own story to tell, and these stories are vital to the development of our neighborhoods and our city.

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Boston 200 is the city's official program to observe the Bicentennial of the American Revolution from April 1975 through December 1976.

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THE SOUTH END

WHEN WILLIAM DAWES, the young Boston shoemaker, left his home the night of that famous ride, two hundred years ago, he slipped quietly through the British pickets gathered along the Boston Neck and continued westward and finally north to join his friend Paul Revere and history at Lexington and Concord.

His route that April night led him through what we now know today as the South End. It was then just a neck—a thin spit of land that tied Roxbury to the city. In those days, South End referred to what is now the financial and retail district between Milk and Essex Streets, an area of open space and gardens, with a few elegant mansions built on streets leading to the waterfront.

It was not until the early 1800s that the first houses began to appear along Boston Neck. Streets were laid out to cross the neck's main artery—Washington Street—in the 1830s and 1840s, and the building of houses followed. One of the most famous of these, the magnificent Deacon House, still stands at the corner of Wash-

ington and Concord streets and is currently home to a hardware store.

But Washington Street and the streets surrounding it remained largely commercial thoroughfares until the 1850s, when the neck was enlarged by massive landfill and what we now call the South End was actually created. By the 1860s, large numbers of middle-class families were moving out of the overcrowded hub of the city to the elegant new bowfront row houses that lined the freshly surveyed streets between the Tremont Street extension in the Back Bay and Albany Street on South Bay. The area became both popular and fashionable, as businessmen, tradesmen, and other professionals moved their families from the old residential districts on Beacon Hill and Fort Hill, and from along Summer Street—areas that had become crowded and threatened by encroaching commercial development.

Even a few "Brahmins" moved to the new townhouses, like George Apley's father in the famous J. P. Marquand novel, "who had been drawn, like so many

FRONT COVER: Childe Hassam's painting of Warren and Columbus Avenues, "A Rainy Day in Boston," 1885

INSIDE COVER: A May Day Queen and her attendants at a settlement house festivity, c.1928

seen a large number of American Indians, according to Nicki Nickerson, who are in "dreadful, demoralized states" and some of whom consequently turned to alcohol.

But while South Enders have been remarkably tolerant of their indigent population, outsiders have exaggerated the problems and often labeled the area a "skid row" or slum. As Nabeeha Hajjar, a resident of the area since 1920, said, "Once they put that mark on it, on a place, even if it's not true, it goes that way—they keep calling it a 'slum'."

The area was seen as a slum by outsiders in the 1950s, at a time when urban renewal programs usually meant demolition, rather than rehabilitation. And that idea was furthered and supported by many city politicians and city planners at that time. Herbert Gans offers one perspective on the prevailing philosophy behind urban renewal during the late 1950s and early 1960s. As he suggests in *The Urban Villagers*: "What seems to happen is that neighborhoods come to be described as slums if they are inhabited by residents who, for a variety of reasons, indulge in overt and visible behavior considered undesirable by the majority of the community." As Mrs. Hajjar explains, "I tell you, we had more barrooms in the South End. That's why they called it slums."

According to Gans, urban planners all too often based their views of an area on both federal and local housing standards that "failed to make a distinction between low-rent and slum housing." He emphasizes what he considers the frequently ignored difference between the two: "Low-rent structures and district may be distinguished from slums by the fact that they provide shelter that may be inconvenient, but that is not harmful."

Although overpopulated with barrooms, the South End was never really a slum. It was an area that provided both adequate and affordable housing for a great many people.

David Myers, a resident of the South End, originally came into the area as a member of the South End project staff in 1964. At that time, residents had just rejected what was known as the Commonway Plan and, as a result, an entirely new staff was brought in to develop a different rehabilitation plan for the area. Myers recalls, "We certainly knew where the rough spots were: It was the amount of substantial residential buildings that were taken in the previous plan."

After a few bleak experiences with demolition, residents persuaded the city to restore rather than tear down their houses. Myers himself often refers to how the planners had to virtually "sell" their ideas to the residents, to gain acceptance from those who were clearly antagonized by the city's original emphasis on demolition. He hopes that the slum clearance mentality will finally be replaced by one that emphasizes preservation of the area and its historic homes. "Essentially you can see some improvement in the community," Myers points out, "although there is a lot of disagreement as to whether that was *because* of the redevelopment authority, or in spite of it."

One area that was cleared to make way for industry was the New York streets area. After watching the destruction of the adjoining neighborhood the residents of Castle Square banded together to make sure that their area would remain residential. The city accommodated dislocated residents by building a housing project in the area, but few of the old residents ever actually lived in it.

The Emergency Tenants Council has been able to relocate many old-time residents in new, rehabbed housing. But E.T.C. worker, Victor Feliciano, insists that adequate housing is still as great a problem for the Spanish-speaking community of the South End as is unemployment and the lack of bilingual education.

There is a contrast in the South End, between the longtime residents and the people who have moved in since rehabilitation began. "There are a lot of new



Plans for

middle-class row houses

designed by N.J. Bradlee, 1858

people coming into the South End at the present time because it's convenient to downtown," says Harry Dow, a respected elder of the Chinese community. "Some are putting in a lot of luxury housing." This, she feels, is discriminatory, because only the wealthy few can afford it.

Richard Card represents a new breed, the middle-class professionals who have taken old bowfronts and rehabilitated them. "There seemed to be a reviving interest in our heritage and the architectural beauty of the buildings," Card says of the past decade or so in the area. "A few people moved into the South End, they told other people, and it snowballed."

Then there are people like Christopher and Claire Hayes, who were both born and raised in the South End, and who have never lived elsewhere. "I think the reason we chose to stay and will continue to stay," according to Mrs. Hayes, "is that the South End is about as varied a community, socially and ethnically as you could find anywhere. I think that for this reason, living

in the South End has been particularly healthy for me."

People like Marlene Stevens feel they have to fight to stay in the South End. But she believes the fight has been worth it, since she wants her children to grow up in the same ethnically and racially diverse and rich climate she herself knew as a child. "My children should be able to take part in the growth of the South End," Stevens says.

On their love for the South End, the different groups are agreed. There are many, like Olive DeCosta who "still love it, and wouldn't want to live any place else in the world."

MINNIE CORDER, like many Jewish immigrants from Russia, settled in the New York streets area of the South End. And, like many immigrant women, she began working in the garment district at a very young age. Her experiences in the factories of the South End led her on to a career in the labor movement:

"I was eleven in the year 1907 when I remember my

mother telling me: 'A girl must learn a trade.' My home was in the city of Berdichev in the state of Kiev, Russia. I was apprenticed there in a shop that was making undergarments. On my way to work I would meet happy-faced children in neat uniforms adorned with shiny metal buttons that glistened in the sun. How I envied those children! 'If I could only go to school!' I thought. But school was only for those whose parents were able to afford tuition.

"In 1911, when my father became very ill, I wrote to my father's sister who lived in Boston, and told her about our misfortune. My aunt said she would send me a ticket to come to America where I would be able to work to help out my parents. My grandfather did not like the idea. He offered to make out a will and leave me half of his property if I would stay home, but I rejected his bribe.

"I arrived in Boston on a drizzly morning in October of 1911 and went to my aunt's house on Rose Street, a narrow alleylike street between Harrison Avenue and Albany Street. Each side of the street was lined by closely knit, red brick houses and near each house was an overflowing garbage can waiting for the sanitation man. My aunt, her husband and their eight children all lived in one cold-water, three-flight walk-up. But their apartment did have a piano.

"What kind of work did you do at home?" I was asked. 'I made buttonholes on men's underpants,' I answered. 'Fine,' said my uncle, 'we will find you a job making buttonholes in men's coats.' And so in January of 1912 I found myself working in one of the largest men's clothing companies in Boston.

"I was under sixteen years of age, so I had to go to night school and bring an attendance certificate to the bookkeeper every week. The schoolroom was the nicest place I had ever seen. It was warm and well lit. The teacher was a law student during the day and taught young immigrants at night, treating us as if we were his lost relatives. I was in school at last.

"After one year on the job, the Boston Tailor Union went out on strike under the leadership of the United Garment Worker's of America. We were out on strike for three months. The speeches I heard at the Union Hall inspired me to go out on the picket line. I was the only girl on the line every morning at 6 o'clock. We were told to work in the same old sweat shop. The only new thing I noticed was someone called a chair man who collected our union dues. Union meetings were never called and we never knew our union officers. In 1914 the tailors broke away from this old union to form the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America. We heard something about it in the shop, but it was not clear what all the fuss was about.

"In 1915, as I was about to enter my shop, I saw an Amalgamated picket line on the sidewalk. I told them I would just go up to get my tools and come back down. When I entered the shop I saw a fat man who said he represented the American Federation of Labor urging us to 'sit down and work and pay no attention to those bums on the sidewalk. If they bother you, we will give you police protection.'

"I did not sit down to work. Instead, I joined the people on the sidewalk. I did not find another job for ten months. The country was preparing for World War I and I found a job working on uniforms. During the war the president of the Amalgamated made peace with the clothing manufacturers and the workers were allowed to organize. I was surprised when the foreman told us one day to go over to the Amalgamated headquarters on Washington Street and join the union. But the only change I saw from the old union was that this time the company bookkeeper deducted our union dues from our paychecks. We did not know much more about how the union was run than that we'd known before. And so after World War I, I joined a more democratic union, the Industrial Workers of the World.

"During the war, I was earning more money by working overtime. I wanted to take piano lessons, but

My uncle said, 'You might break our piano. You'd better just learn to sweep the kitchen.' I wanted to learn how to dance, but my aunt said, 'If you go to dancing school, you will just meet up with a lot of bums.' There were lots of things happening in the South End at the time, lectures, plays and meetings most every evening. But my uncle said: 'You must be home by 9 o'clock.' I realized that they were my guardians and I had to do as I was told. But as soon as I became a citizen, I moved out of their tenement on Rose Street.

"One day in 1916, on my way to work, I read in the paper that some sailors had broken up an anti-war parade sponsored by the Young People's Socialist League. So the next day, I went down to the League's office in Park Square and bought some of their literature. In a short time, I became a member and part of Professor Scott Nearing's peace movement. The PSL's, as they called themselves, elected me librarian. That was the nicest thing that could happen to me. I read as many books as I had time for and I really became educated in my own way. Socialism became my new religion."

NABEEHA HAJJAR immigrated to the United States in 1920, and vividly recalls her arrival in Buffalo, New York, on Labor Day. "I didn't like it," Mrs. Hajjar remembers. "When we got to Buffalo and I saw the smoke and the dirty buildings, I started to cry. This is America? I asked. Is this what I am coming for? I want to go back. I want to go back." She cried, she says, for six months, but adds that it was better when she and her husband moved into their home in the South End. She has chosen to remain in that same house and today is one of the most respected women in Boston's Syrian-Lebanese community:

My name is Nabeeha Hajjar and I've lived here since 1921. I've lived here all these years and all my children were born in this house, and they were married out of this house. And I love this house—it's part of me.

You know, I've been living here so long that I'd hate to live in any other place and I enjoy all my friends around here and I know all the area and everywhere I go, everybody says hello. They show respect for you; if you go to a new area, nobody knows you, you wouldn't have any satisfaction, or making friends, or anything. I know quite a lot of people. I know of people that know me and I don't know them. I made a good reputation for myself. I belong to so many organizations.

"We had this Syrian Mothers Club. That was years ago. We had about 40 members and we used to have suppers all the time and we used to go on picnics. They had the farm that was for the children in the summer. We used to go at the end of the summer for three, four days. We'd buy all our food for the whole weekend and we used to cook there and sleep there and stay there. They used to take us in the beachwagon that they had in the South End house.

"We were the second Syrian family to live in Union Park. Now they are moving away from Shawmut Avenue and lots of people moved away from Union Park. But at the time, I remember in 1930 and 1940, the Syrian-Lebanese families were there by the hundreds.

"The other people who lived on the Park at that time, they were all American people. I knew a few of them, the McCormacks and McLaughlins, and the—I forgot their names; it's been a long time. We were very courteous when we saw each other—you know, friendly—but we weren't that close.

"The Irish kids, they were little toughs. They used to try to fight with the Lebanese kids; they didn't want them around. But the Lebanese kids stood up for their rights. They used to fight on the street, like all kids will fight. But there was no major tragedy. They got used to one another. They had lots of nice friends, the Irish boys. But mostly they stuck with each other, you know, the Lebanese.

"The Syrian people, most of them when they first came to this country, used to peddle. They'd take stuff



in a suitcase, little articles, and they'd take a streetcar and go out of Boston to the suburbs and sell from door to door. People didn't come to the stores like they do now. They didn't have shopping centers, and they used to have to come in town. This way, it was to save them trouble, money and time. They go to the house and open the suitcase: linen; underwear, stockings, gloves, pencils, powder—anything. Cooking utensils, cups. Small articles. They would stick them in the suitcases and carry them on their backs, on their shoulders and go take the bus. Out to Brookline and Brighton, all these little places. They sell to the American people.

"They ended up in real estate and then they bought factories, rug factories. My husband, he used to have a factory of clothes. He was the first Syrian that opened a factory—a dress factory. He opened it with another guy that he knew—each one had a few dollars. I don't know how much, but they opened a small place first. Things were very cheap then. Even to rent a place, it was very, very much cheaper. And to buy the material was cheap. My God, you make a dress, you buy material to make a dress, it wouldn't cost you 10 cents.

"He had about 50 girls working for him and he used to do the mark and the styles. He was the cutter and he had another man to handle the sales and the books. They were doing very good until the Depression started. He lost everything. The people who owed him money—if we could collect it now! He had to sell all the machines and most of the material. Then he bought some machines and started to do some work in the cellar. He had two girls come and work. He had all the material here and we were living upstairs.

"It was always a lodging house, but we improved it. When the children moved away I rented more rooms, the ones the children had. Most of the Syrian-Lebanese they do the same thing I did. They live in them and they improve them. Most had roomers in the house. They still have roomers.

"I rent to any nationality who behave themselves. I have Puerto Ricans here. I've had Italians, I've had Greeks. One fellow, he lived here 24 years. I had to put him out because he wanted to bring his girlfriend to sleep with him and I said, 'Nothing doing. The rule is for everybody. You want her. Take the room next to you for her and she'll have her own room, you have your own room, and I don't care what you do at night.' So he moved out on account of that.

"We used to have a lot of drunks. We used to see them on the sidewalks, sleeping, and in the gutter. More than we do now. They didn't cause no trouble, just noise. I get used to seeing them and I know they are harmless. When I rented rooms, I used to tell them, 'If you drink, I'm going to put you out.' So when I see them like that, I used to tell my husband, 'Tell him to move out.' As soon as you'd tell them to move, they'd move. You never had any trouble with them.

"I was a delegate for the BRA for six years. I represented the South End here, the neighborhood. But when I saw things were not going the way they should I was disgusted and I stopped going.

"I don't know why they tore it all down, on both sides from Harrison Avenue and from Washington Street. They took the whole area. I don't know the reason why. It wasn't that bad. No, it wasn't that bad. Once they put that mark on it—even if it's not true, it goes that way: they keep calling it 'slum.' I don't think it was worse than any other place. But somehow, I don't know, they pointed to the South End and called it the slums. Yes, they used to call it a slum, but they don't do it anymore."

OLIVE and JOHN DeCOSTA raised eight children in the South End. One of their daughters, who helped them fight eviction from their cold water flat, reflected with her parents on their life in the neighborhood. John DeCosta tells of the contrasts between his native South Boston and his adopted home:
"The difference between South Boston, where I was

born, and the South End, where I've lived most of my life, is that Southie was to me more a residential area for Irish and Polish people. The South End had more industry and more nationalities. It was more of a melting pot. When I lived in South Boston, I lived on the lower end around "B" Street until 1912 and I remember in those days coming over to the South End in the summer across the Dover Street bridge where they'd have two bathing house barges tied to the wharf in the bay. One was for boys and one was for girls.

"Albany Street along the bay in those days was filled with coal and lumber yards. The place was just thick with them. And on the other side of the street there were many factories. The MBTA bus yards right next to us were originally the Baldwin Locomotive Works. They had a track they ran across Albany Street onto the boats in the bay and that's where they shipped them away. And this whole section was crawling with

piano factories. A lot of people worked over here. I was working here in the South End at the time and I would see people come by the thousands, practically, walking over the Dover Street bridge going into the different factories in the South End.

"Later on in 1922, even before I got married, I was driving a cab for Checker Taxi and I got acquainted a lot more with the South End. What I remember about it most from years ago was Dover and Washington streets—that was practically the center of the city, for excitement anyway. Today, it's a forgotten area, but up until twenty-five years ago, it was quite a spot. There was Meyer Murray and his pool place and bowling alleys, one of the most famous spots in Boston. That's where John L. Sullivan hung out—the prize fighter. Meyer Murray's, why it was quite an establishment. Down in the basement he had bowling alleys, and on the first floor as you went in, he had a barber



*The intersection of
Dover and Washington St
under the El, c.1900*

pop, and then in the back of the barber shop I can't tell you how many pool tables there were. The best of pool players, that's where you found them.

"What made the place so lively was the Boston Grand Opera House which was more for comedy than for the classical. After it got away from plays and vaudeville, they had wrestling matches there.

"After driving a cab, I went into the painting business and I was on relief during the Depression. But we had a politician in those days, Pat Coleman—God bless him—every Thanksgiving and Christmas he used to give out chickens and groceries. He was quite a character, Pat Coleman. He belonged to the South End Democratic Club and he was an ally of James Michael Curley. They didn't come any better than James Michael. He had no enemies in the South End. I was on welfare during the Depression along with many others and he was the only man in this city—before and after that time—who at Christmas gave the people an extra five dollar bill in the welfare check. And that was a gold mine in those days. They say about James Michael, 'Oh well, he was just a crook,' this and that, but, if he was, if he took half a loaf, he gave you back a loaf. That I can say of him. He was a wonderful man, he really was—James Michael.

"When we lived in the New York streets area there were all kinds of ethnic groups, but when we moved up here around the Cathedral practically everyone was Irish. My kids waited awhile to be accepted, believe it or not. We had a different name you know. But my wife knew a lot of these people when she grew up in New York streets, but when they moved up here they became lace curtain Irish; they were getting up in the world. Some were starting to move to Dorchester. There was a Depression but many of them had city jobs so they got on a little better.

"I can remember being on the WPA which was controlled mostly by Irish. I was working out at the Fairview Cemetery and I was treated coolly until they

found out that I came from South Boston. One or two guys from Southie who were working there knew me and said, 'Oh, he's all right.'

OLIVE DECOSTA *talks about her neighborhood:*

"I was born in the old New York Streets district. We lived on Albany Street and then on Dover Street. It was so different then. We had the open street cars, which were wonderful, even though the people were always stepping all over you. I grew up in an area that was heavily Jewish. The Italians were moving in slowly too. Later the Jewish moved out Dorchester way and then we got some Greek people and finally the minority groups.

"There were a lot of barrooms in the Dover and Albany streets area. It wasn't the best neighborhood in the city, naturally; it was all poor people—stablemen like my father with jobs that didn't bring in much money. So you paid two and a half dollars a week for rent.

"The kids got along very well together. Everything was united. They were all together. There was no big issue of race. Someone all of a sudden made it a big issue. In recent years, it's started to make a big difference. But it didn't when we lived down there in the New York Streets. You know what I think it was? We were all poor. You didn't have any more than me. And that made you equal.

"I loved the South End. I still love it. I wouldn't want to live anywhere else in the world."

Having been born and raised in the South End, GEORGE ADAMS spent several years in New York working for the NAACP. He then returned to Boston where he has worked as a general contractor and participated extensively in community affairs:

"I am a long time resident of the South End. My father arrived in the States about 1914 from his home in the British West Indies, Jamaica. He traveled alone. My



*View of the South End
over the Boston and Albany
railroad tracks, c.1930*

mother stayed in Jamaica at that time. After legally establishing himself, my father settled in the South End and began working for the railroad at South Station. I was born here when my family lived on Albion Street. When I was about five years old we moved deeper into the South End, to Porter Street. The neighborhood consisted of Irish, Armenian, French, Italian, Jewish and Polish families. There was a 'high mix.'

"I remember going home from school—changing into my play clothes and going outdoors to play stickball, marbles and all the other childhood games with kids in the neighborhood. It was grand. We had our differences, but admired each other for those differences.

"In the growing years, school kids didn't practice discrimination or suffer from it. It was only after leaving school and becoming involved in the economic struggle for life that discrimination began to take place. Blacks were handicapped at first mainly on the economic level, and were relegated to positions as laborers for economic reasons. In order to survive they had to accept those positions open to them in spite of the talents they possessed. I remember my sisters doing summer work in the laundries on West Newton Street. There were Jews, Italians and Irish in the laundries also, but only because they lacked formal education or any other opportunity at the time. A Black who had talent, some capability, was still forced to accept employment in those areas.

"Black men either remained in ditches on construction jobs, or tried to become waiters, etc. A good number of Blacks worked for the railroad, as did my father, mainly as porters and waiters on the trains. The porters, waiters, and other workers established the Pullman Porter's Union, a large union having an office on Yarmouth Street for many years, and which was all Black. It was the only union Boston Blacks belonged to until recent times.

"So in my father's day and when I was a child

rowing up in the South End, most of the segregation was in terms of labor. The Blacks were ostracized in economic competition. There was segregation in some restaurants in the South End, but there was no segregation in the schools, no segregation in the streets. It was only going into the labor pool on the economic level that Blacks really suffered and were ostracized.

"The changes began in the late 1940's as more minorities arrived and attended schools, and the housing situation began to cause an imbalance. Segregation increased as white people migrated to suburbia and black people migrated in from the southern farm area. At first, Blacks, even very poor Blacks, had little trouble getting housing in the South End, but with the use of suburbia things began to worsen. Schools began to break down and Blacks were refused housing in suburbia. Then the banks made it quite difficult, if not impossible, for minority people or Blacks to secure loans. On that level discrimination really took place.

"The World War II years brought additional migration to the South End and Lower Roxbury because housing was available here. Blacks gathered together because of common needs as did the Irish in South Boston, the Greeks who lived collectively in the South End around their little church, or the Italians who lived in the North End. But after the War, Black people were forced to gather together because nothing else was made available to them. And on the adult level, there were more and more places Blacks were not allowed to go. And then you began to realize there was a new generation of children who couldn't avoid being there was a 'white world' they would never be a part of. A world of Anglo-Saxon people where Blacks would be ostracized socially and in terms of labor.

"When I left Boston in the 1950s to work in the National Office of the NAACP in New York, the civil rights movement was just beginning. Martin Luther King, Jr. had just come onto the scene in a very quiet way.

"While living in New York, I missed the social warmth and close family community ties of Boston. Of course, I was a stranger in New York, but I found a lack of concern in the neighborhoods there. I left New York in 1959 because I found that I was losing my direction. I was glad to get back to Boston.

"About this time Black people began turning to new organizations for help in achieving recognition to find a way out of their suffering. The NAACP had been fighting in many cities on a conservative basis—legally and politically. During the 1960s the NAACP became more recognized as the body to advance our needs collectively and, also, to help give the Blacks courage to fight back.

"I don't believe a Black person should see himself as a human being apart. I'm human and that's my whole premise. The struggle has to be for the Black man's human rights. My color happens to be black, but first and foremost I am human. That is where the emphasis should be placed—on human respect, not color."

A lifelong resident of the South End, MARLENE STEVENS has six children but still finds time to participate in a number of important political activities. She is chairperson of the South End Community Health Clinic, the only community controlled facility of its kind in the country, and of the Task Force in the Cathedral Housing Project. As head of the Task Force, Marlene has to confront the serious problems that plague one of the oldest projects in the city:

"I was born in 1933. I grew up on Northampton Street in the area between Shawmut and Tremont Street. A lot of families who lived there had at least one West Indian parent, sometimes two. There were also a lot of folks that had just come recently from the South. We got along well together. I can remember a lot of happiness, but not in the way of material things.

"There were a few white families too, especially over on Mass. Ave. Some Chinese too. At that time, we



were not too concerned about what nationality they were. Looking back, I do remember that in the Edward Grammar School on Northampton Street some of the children had Syrian names, Greek names, Irish names, and so on. The majority in the school was black but there were children from white families. We played with them after school and things like that.

"The first Blacks who came to the South End moved over from Beacon Hill. In the twenties and thirties, a lot of Black people were working on the trains as stewards and redcaps and what have you. They could not find a place to live on Beacon Hill, so they moved into the South End. There were a lot of rooming houses here, especially for the men who commuted back and forth on the New York-New Haven railroad.

"The Black community around Northampton Street lived in cold water flats. My mother paid \$15 a month for her place in 1933. But when I was growing up on Northampton Street, we did have trees. One of the first things I remember about urban renewal was that they took down the trees. People at the time didn't put up a fight about it. But the trees were really beautiful. I remember that. When they took down the trees, I think I really began to see some of the ugliness of tenement housing. The trees hid a lot.

"In the thirties and forties the corner of Columbus Avenue and Mass. Avenue was a center of activity for some Black people because it was the scene of the nightclubs, the old High Hat Club and the others. But it was different for the people who lived around Northampton Street. They were very hardworking factory laborers and day workers and they weren't into the nightclub scene. Most of the women did day work of some sort. So for one segment of the black community, Columbus Avenue and Mass. Avenue was a recreation area, but for another segment it wasn't.

"The Evolution of Black Men Today", by Roy Cato, Jr., contemporary mural at Shawmut and West Canton Streets

"For most of the folks around Northampton Street recreation centered around the old Puritan Theater on Washington Street where we used to pay 12 cents to go to the movies. Twice a week there was bingo. We also went to a Social Service Center in the Lennox Street Housing Project where they used to have teenage dances. But I think we more or less had to make our own recreation, which was usually sitting out on the front steps and game playing along Northampton Street.

"A lot of families sat out on the front steps. On one side of the street, where folks owned their own houses, there were backyards. We didn't have backyards in the tenements; but on the other side of Northampton Street, there was a woman from St. Kitts who was like a mother to the whole neighborhood. We would all play in her backyard which was really a center for everything that was being done. That particular house was central for recreation.

"In the forties, which is the first time I remember, most Black people on Northampton Street were working. Some of the men took the MTA to work in the Navy Yard. My mother came here from Jamaica hoping to be a nurse, but she ended up as a domestic. If she'd stayed in Jamaica she probably would have been much better off. She is happy about me being on the board of the South End Health Clinic, but sometimes I look back and think of how her young girl dreams were dashed. It makes me very angry.

"I left Northampton Street in the sixties. A lot of Blacks that lived in the South End, the younger ones, made it their goal to move up to what we called 'The Hill, the Humboldt Avenue area right in the middle of Roxbury. The housing was bad in the South End, cold water flats and what have you. And so a majority of my friends made it their goal to move out into Roxbury.

"I lived on Walnut Street, until the apartment building I lived in was torn down and I was relocated.

I moved into the Cathedral Housing Project nine years ago. My first impression was: 'Oh, hell, I'm not staying here.' But I'm still here because of economics, a large family, you know, you name it, I'm still here, still struggling to find a larger place. Having grown up in the atmosphere of Northampton Street, it was really difficult for me to have to move into a housing project and live in a concrete jungle. Even though my mother was very poor, like all the other parents, I had a lot of non-material things as a child that my children just haven't had.

"My own individual fight now is just to stay in the South End. I've been here for forty-one years and my mother was here over fifty years, and we should be able to stay. My children should be able to take part in the growth of the South End. They shouldn't have to be relocated just because they are poor. Relocation has destroyed so much. So much. I've seen it. Unless it stops, the South End won't be the South End much longer."

After working as a community organizer and settlement house director in the South End for several years, ALBERT BOER, a native of Holland, has made a close study of the ways in which urban renewal has affected the people of the area:

"I originally came here from Holland in 1956 after working as an engineer and I did my graduate work in community organization at Atlanta University. My first job was here in the South End at Lincoln House in the old Castle Square area. I immediately became involved in the whole clearance situation because Castle Square had been designated for industrial use just like the New York Streets area that ran between Albany and Washington, just south of Chinatown. I helped the people in Castle Square organize, to change the designation from industrial to 80 percent residential. It would have been disastrous for the South End if that industrial designation had gone through because it would have cut the community off from the downtown

area with an industrial corridor and the South End would have lost much of its downtown orientation.

"Originally the South End was a no-man's land. There was no plan for urban renewal that would benefit the residents in any way. As a matter of fact, most city officials had given up on the South End. They would walk around and point to a cracking facade and say, 'The South End is lost; it's not worth rehabilitating. No bank will put money into it.'

"There was a very purposeful policy of neglect in the South End. The banks red lined the district in terms of loans and insurance. Many families couldn't even get basic fire insurance when I came here. No new construction had been started since before the Depression. City services were terrible. The garbage situation seems bad to some people now, but when I came in the fifties you could see thirty or forty feet of garbage piled in alleyways, just rotting away there. The South End was gerrymandered politically because the politicians didn't think a hell of a lot of it. It had a terrible reputation for crime, partly from the fact that gangsters used to hang out there in the old days. There was an oversaturation of bars. I think at one point we did research showing that there was one bar for every two hundred people in the South End. The newspapers gave it very negative coverage, always pointing out the problems.

"By the time I came here, the actual clearance of the New York Streets had taken place. There were some 900 families who had lived there. Those people were literally scared out of there. And that was the key to the protests in Castle Square just on the other side of Washington Street. I mean those families were not going to be trampled on the way the New York Streets' families were.

"The old Castle Square section consisted largely of cold water flats in apartments rather than single family row houses like the rest of the South End below Dover Street. In many ways the neighborhood was a

*The Castle Square Theatre,
razed in 1933,
was one of the square's
most prominent landmarks*



lot like the old West End that was totally destroyed by urban renewal in 1959. It was a more mixed community though, one of the most integrated in the city. There were quite a few Blacks and Portuguese families who were very close. They were all very warm people. I could walk around there any time and be invited to stay at someone's house for dinner. There was an old Jewish synagogue there. And you could still see a lot of the old immigrants. There was a saddle maker there and you still saw horsedrawn carts and junk shops around. The zoning was very mixed. There were also a lot of cheap cafes.

"Even before urban renewal was announced for Castle Square in 1959 we were able to do some organizational work that helped to pull the community together, specifically in terms of relighting the area and getting more adequate police protection. I remember when we first got the modern lighting. People felt a tremendous psychological boost. For the first time, the city had shown some interest in their community. And

then after all that new lighting was put in, it came as a fantastic blow to hear that demolition was coming. I think it was basically a feeling of 'God damn, they can't do this to us,' 'us' meaning the entire community.

"When it came to the overall effects of urban renewal on the entire South End, it was a similar story. A number of plans were proposed and thrown out by community folks. I remember they had some guy from Australia, a city planner, come in with his fancy concept of a 'common way,' a green-belt that would go smack down the middle of the South End with all kinds of recreational facilities connected to it. It would have involved the demolition of four or five hundred houses. And the people just said: 'Hey, it isn't worth it. This is not going to be the kind of project where people are going to be kicked out of their homes and not benefit from it.' And so increasingly there was emphasis on rehabilitation. All kinds of promises were made in terms of loans and grants that would be available to allow residents to benefit.

"A lot of the rehabbing that's been done has been done by outsiders. Some four thousand units have been rehabbed and that has also created a fantastic relocation caseload. BRA statistics show that the average income of the new people who obtained 312 federal loans for rehab was \$18,000. So a lot of the families who got subsidies out of urban renewal were not poor families. The folks who were kicked out of the buildings before they rehabbed and made into luxury housing were basically rooming house occupants, working people and elderly folk.

"I don't know if the BRA ever officially labeled the South End a slum, but that was the only official designation in Washington that mattered. By saying that all of the housing was substandard, they could designate the area for urban renewal. The South End didn't have the flavor of the ghetto or the slums in other cities I knew. But it got urban renewal anyway. When I left in 1964 it had only affected New York streets and Castle Square, but when I returned two years ago, the first thing that struck me was the fantastic amount of clearance that had taken place. The population had declined drastically. Because of urban renewal the Black population was pushed further down into Roxbury. It was unbelievable that a black area had turned into a 60 percent white area in such a short time. The mobility has been fantastic. Most of the folks I knew in the fifties have disappeared.

"In the next few years this community is going to become more and more middle and upper income, especially in terms of renting and housing development, because the only money available is conventional bank financing and only a few of the big, luxury housing developers can get that money. There is big money to be made because there is a big market in apartments. It's become obvious that the South End is too valuable to be left to poor folk."

DAVID M. MYERS, *an architect and city planner, came to*

the staff of the Boston Redevelopment Authority at the beginning of 1964, as part of "a complete change in the staff of the South End Project," a change resulting in a greater emphasis on architectural preservation. Myers now works for the Department of Housing and Urban Development:

"I remember the first time when I went into the South End, being completely dismayed by the whole thing. As I recall, I must have gone over by subway to Copley Square, and walked across Dartmouth Street. The expression about city diamonds was very true; you could see all the broken glass reflecting the sunlight. It didn't strike me as particularly beautiful at the time. The interesting thing was that I walked two more blocks into the South End and looked down the street where I now live, and said, 'That's the street I'm going to live on.'

"I moved to the South End at least partially because I worked there; it was convenient. I saw it as inexpensive housing, which it was at the time. And because the people that I had met while working there—those people who lived in the community—I felt I had something in common with them.

"I think the people who came to the South End in that period—in the early 60s—were people who were just a little crazy, to take one of those old houses and spend the kind of money or time or effort that it took to bring it into a liveable place that the market was going to support.

"The people that were there in the early 60s—the tenants—if we wanted to go out and clean up the street, we wouldn't think twice about including them in that kind of effort. There was no distinction between homeowners and tenants. We didn't see it when we were doing the South End renewal plan. There was no division at all. Somebody once said there should be tenant representation and a homeowner said, 'Gee, I'm a tenant, too, but I pay my rent to the bank.' I think that was the feeling: we were all there and it was our community, no less for tenants.

"What happened was that as the South End be-

came a more desirable place to live, it became obviously a more desirable place to rent apartments. And people came in with the idea that they were going to take an old row house and put in five apartments. Nothing says the houses are too small for that. The point is that the area is too small for that. If you put more than one person on each of those floors—they're five story houses by and large—you begin to generate almost one car per floor. So the pressure for parking is beginning to make the South End just as bad as Beacon Hill, with no kind of outlet.

"The thing that somebody deserves credit for—and I will assume it's the BRA—is that without something, the South End would have been completely destroyed. Somehow there was a misconception about what constituted a slum area. The Castle Square area was completely demolished, and the West End was demolished. I think that the South End was to follow. If the BRA had stayed out of the area, what would have happened? Would pressures from the Prudential Center have made it a stable, middle-class community and driven the poor people out? I don't know.

"But the point is, that it is probably the best example of Victorian urban planning in the country. If not the best, it is certainly the largest. The area we dealt with covers almost a square mile and about 400 acres that is now on the National Register of Historic Landmarks. The brick rowhouse format, the street patterns, the old squares, fine old, individual buildings—clearly this is an area that was worth saving, and if the BRA was responsible, then they deserve a lot of credit just for that.

After a childhood in Quincy, NICKI NICKERSON moved to the South End when the old West End was destroyed by urban renewal in 1959. During the sixties she became active in the welfare rights movement and since then she has been an articulate voice for poor women in the South End:

"I came from Quincy, Massachusetts. All my people

were New Englanders, from both sides of the family. My father's people are from Cape Cod and my mother's people are from Maine, the Penobscot tribe. My philosophy is 100 percent Native American. I don't believe some people should have more than others. I guess you could call it communism, but it started among the Indians long before Marx was even a gleam in his father's eye. The Indians lived together or they starved together. One guy didn't have more than another unless he snuck it. It was a great philosophy, but the white man just could not tolerate it. He had to wipe it out as best he could.

"I left Quincy when my father was put in the Chelsea Naval Hospital. We went to the old West End in about 1944 after living on Gallivan Boulevard in Dorchester, where our house literally fell down around us. I watched them start moving people out of the West End long before the actual demolition took place. They talked them into it by telling them, 'You'll have the first chance to come back because you're long standing citizens.' They never got back. After getting pushed out of the West End, I came to the South End, because it was mainly poor and you could always find an apartment.

"I was in a state of depression when I got involved in Mothers for Adequate Welfare (M.A.W.) in the mid-sixties. One of the young women who was working in the welfare office and organizing Mothers for Adequate Welfare noticed me and asked me to join. In a few years I became secretary. They really are beautiful mothers.

"When I was in M.A.W. I kept pushing for the Welfare Department to find us decent jobs, and if the jobs didn't pay up to what we received from welfare, I insisted that the Department pay a supplement. And they called me a socialist and said, 'we'll have a communist state, we'll have welfare state.' Well, they finally did decide to supplement people under the new work incentive program, but their supplementation

level is so absurd. I have a part time job but according to the U.S. Labor Department figures, I'm still below the poverty line.

"I met poor white people and black people down here in the South End. We were all in the same boat, and we all got along good. We helped each other out, we loaned each other things, and borrowed from each other. We needed each other in a crisis.

"I have also come to know many of the Indian people in the South End. They're in a dreadful state. Dreadful. Nobody talks about them. Nobody includes them. The Indian is demoralized here. Folks who come here are still quite sensitive. They're not accustomed to either the sophistication or the horror of the cities. It's a heartache to see them. Those of us with the white skin, the "breeds" like myself, are very militant, because we have to atone for having this terrible skin. We feel guilty."

RICHARD CARD grew up in Maine and originally moved to the Back Bay in the late 1950s. He moved into the South End, he recalls, after a visit to Alexandria, Virginia. While there he stayed with friends in their eighteenth century townhouse, and remembers thinking to himself, 'Isn't this delightful, having a home in the city?' He turned to the South End for the kind of house he wanted, at a price he could afford. A former president of the South End Historical Society, he has been a resident of the area since 1963:

"I happened to go to a concert over at Jordan Hall and I sat next to Tony Giarraputo who had been active in this area and he mentioned that I could get what he had. He had bought his house for something between seven and eight thousand dollars, and I thought to myself—cureka! He mentioned to me a house which was in a rather derelict condition, which was for sale at something like \$5,000 over on Dartmouth Place. So I came down and looked at that. The fellow who lived in the house next door mentioned to me that the real estate agent who was handling that was named Sprog-

ges. I called her and asked about seeing this; she showed me some others, and I looked at several houses. Then she said, my husband and I have bought two houses on West Brookline Street. And they showed me their house which I thought was magnificent. Then, they said they had decided they would sell me their other house, and I did buy this house from them. They live across the street; we've been the best of friends and excellent neighbors ever since then. All this was in 1963. I moved in immediately and started working.

"This house was empty when I bought it. A lot of houses had been abandoned, were vacant—derelict. The people who now criticize the middle-class homeowners neglect the fact that when we came, we gambled everything we had on something they fled from.

"People told me I was crazy. I worked for a bank and our real estate department told me I was out of my head to spend \$10,000 for a house in the South End. My lawyer said he couldn't understand what on earth I was doing.

"But I bought the house. I have no wealth. I have a decent job in a bank, but banks don't pay huge amounts of money. I took every bit of savings I could scrape together and I had a second mortgage until I could manage to consolidate. So people have done this. A few people had wealth enough to buy houses. But not in general. It's been mainly young people, young families, starting out.

"When I came here, the buildings were either rooming houses, empty, or rather scruffy apartments. Some of the rooming houses were good rooming houses. There was a lady who rented to Boston University medical students and one just knew that her house was spotless. There were some private homes; some families who had been there for many years. But there were also some houses with bright red lights actually burning in the windows.

"I think the construction of the Prudential Center changed the climate a little bit in Boston. The city was

*The Boston and Albany
yards bordered the South End
until they were cleared to make
way for the Prudential Center*



no longer thought of as completely stagnant. Also, the increasing traffic jams made people more interested in moving into the city. There seemed to be a reviving interest in our heritage and the architectural beauty of the buildings. After a few people moved into the South End, they told other people, and it snowballed.

"It's unfortunate that prices have gone up as much as they have, but people are still buying houses. I think the buildings here were really underpriced. They were worth a lot more than what was charged. Now I don't think they're overpriced compared to suburban real estate. They're probably more realistically priced.

"The thing which made this street good was the fact that the houses are almost all owner occupied. Whether they're private homes or apartments, the owner is in the house. I think we've made this a very pleasant street. If someone in the street yells, 'Help,' fifteen people call the police. And you just don't get that in some other areas. I like the aspects of a small town, the friendliness. When I go to the grocery store

on a Saturday morning, I talk to fifteen people on the way home.

"In the first few years I was here, I believed very strongly in urban renewal and the BRA. In recent years, I have become totally disillusioned. I feel we would be better off without them, without the City's involvement. The City in the past has been the worst offender in demolishing architecturally important buildings, fine, substantial buildings which, even if the interior was shoddy, could have been gutted and the exterior used to build whatever was needed inside. And I think it's unforgivable that these buildings were just bashed down. I sometimes wonder if it's more profitable to build new tacky-tacky boxes than it is to restore that which is beautiful and pleasant for the people who live in them. I feel rather bitter at the way the City has so consistently in the past ten years sided with those who want lots of public housing, and sided against the homeowners, which I feel would be the backbone of the area.

"I think that what is good has been accomplished by individuals. Most people fall in love with the South End and stay here. The majority of people I know are thoroughly enchanted with the South End."

A native of Boston's Chinatown, HARRY DOW has retired in the South End after a successful professional career in New York and in his hometown. Mr. Dow is now active in community affairs as a leading spokesman for the Chinese in the South End:

"America was supposed to be a melting pot. It wasn't in fact. There was an awful lot of discrimination. The Chinese were called the 'yellow peril' that was threatening America.

"I remember going to kindergarten with my sister and we sat through a couple of days and couldn't understand a thing because we didn't have any English speaking abilities. And so they sent us home. Somebody found us roaming the streets and took us back to our house. My father asked us why we didn't stay in school and we told him we didn't understand so they sent us home. The various races were very far apart when I was young.

"My family is originally from the area around Canton. Most of the Chinese in the United States are from that area. Chinatown in San Francisco, the biggest, is mostly Cantonese. The Chinese were originally brought over here to build the railroads and do all the heavy work. It was a form of slavery. So actually the Chinese had have it as hard as the Blacks in the United States. But the Blacks articulated their discontent and made people understand the sufferings they went through. The Chinese have been more fatalistic. What occurs will occur. We could go through life being frugal. People could slave away in the laundries and prepare for old age and then have sudden inflation come along and wipe everything out. Yes, the Chinese have really gone through many of the things the Blacks endured.

"The Chinese have been segregated in San Francisco, New York and Boston, much the same way blacks have been segregated. Segregation was, I suppose a natural event in the old days. It happened to everybody. It happened to the Irish when they came over. It happened to the Italians and it happened to the Jews. It happened to all these groups until finally they were able to become adjusted. But for most of the Chinese adjustment has been more difficult. Color might have had something to do with it, along with language and culture.

"Originally all the Chinese were concentrated in Chinatown. They were hemmed in. But the Tufts Medical School and the highway construction of the Mass. Pike Extension have taken up a lot of property in Chinatown and reduced the housing to practically nothing. And so the overflow of Chinese has been into the South End. Even if they could afford to go to the suburbs, most Chinese people would not do that because they would lose contact with the people they live with and their social life would be disrupted. So they just overflowed into the South End.

"There is a fairly large Chinese population, between five and seven thousand, in the South End as a result of the overflow. The predominantly Chinese area of the South End runs down Shawmut Avenue from around Upton Street to East Berkeley Street. And all of those side streets between Shawmut and Tremont have a lot of Chinese, Union Park, Waltham, Hanson, Milford and Dwight streets. Castle Square also has a lot of Chinese.

"Many of the Chinese that live in the South End live in Chinese-owned property, but not all of the Chinese own property. There aren't that many Chinese landlords. Actually, it doesn't look so bright for the Chinese in Boston, either in the South End or Chinatown. The laundries have practically disappeared. They used to be the principal business. Many restaurants have dashed out into the suburbs and out on

The Chickering Piano Factory has been renovated for use as artist studios and apartments



the highways. Back in the old days the only place you could get Chinese food would be in Chinatown. Now the restaurant business has declined, and that is the main problem for Chinese workers. The workers have no employment outside the restaurants and the restaurants can't take care of all of them. A few work in the sweat shops, the needle trades, but other than that there is no work for the Chinese. They're not allowed into bricklaying or anything else. There is no avenue for them.

"A lot of these Chinese workers live in the South End, but they all gravitate back to Chinatown because most of the jobs, associations and groups are situated there. There are no separate organizations or associations in the South End that you could say represent the Chinese in the South End. The Chinese are generally very obedient people. Whatever comes down from the top is all right for them, you know. In other words, it doesn't make any difference who is king or head of the government. You still have to pay your

taxes. That's why there isn't too much resistance to what the establishment might say. There wasn't too much opposition to the Mass. Pike construction that destroyed housing in Chinatown.

"Now there is a big housing problem in the South End. And the Chinese are caught up in it like everybody else. There are a lot of new people who are coming into the South End at the present time, because it's so convenient to downtown. Some are putting in a lot of luxury housing and luxury housing is discriminatory because nobody in the lower and middle income categories can afford it. This is unfair to my way of thinking.

"I don't mind people coming into the South End to try to establish themselves, buying buildings and improving them for their own use, establishing roots here for themselves, but when they buy up blocks at a time and then rehabilitate them into luxury housing, it's different.

"Some people have one or two apartments where

they can charge a market rent to carry their mortgage and the expenses of improving their property. I can understand that. But others come in and buy a block or a dozen houses at a time and improve them.

"The people who are coming in buying up these bow fronts and doing luxury rehabbing are getting five and six hundred dollars for some of their apartments. I call this rent-gouging; it's not really free enterprise. You see the South End is under an Urban Renewal Plan established for the purposes of improving the area for its lower and middle income residents. When these new people come in and establish luxury housing in the area, I feel that they are taking advantage of the Urban Renewal Plan even though they are not entitled to receive its benefits. If you went to Congress and asked them for a law to improve an area for the purposes of having luxury housing built, I doubt very much that the Congress would ever pass such a law.

"But these luxury housing developers claim that they have as much right to be in the area as anybody else, and they claim this is their right under the Constitution and under God. But they forget that the entire area has been improved with public funds which put in parks, sidewalks, new sewers, etc. because the South End was poor and run down. And now they are reaping the benefit of that.

"Meanwhile, these same people want to stop all subsidized housing in the area. They say there is enough public housing and that more subsidized housing will reduce the South End to a slum. But I think the facts show that there isn't enough subsidized housing in the South End. The Chinese and other poor groups desperately need decent, inexpensive housing. But the opponents of low income public housing say that now housing should be improved by private developers. These developers and their allies have no right to develop housing privately if it causes the poor people who presently live in the South End, people

who have tried for years to make it a home for themselves, if it causes these people to be moved somewhere where they have no way to live properly. It amounts to exile and deportation to my way of thinking. It's really a shame.

As a youngster from Puerto Rico, DANNY SOLTREN learned how to survive and finally to thrive in the rough-and-tumble street life of the South End. Since he came before most of the Puerto Ricans arrived in the South End, Danny learned valuable lessons about the city, which he has passed on to newcomers from Puerto Rico, with whom he works in a city agency:

"I remember the first thing I saw when I came here as a kid was the big elevated train tracks; they looked so dull; it looked so lousy that it depressed me quite a bit. We moved around all over the South End in those early years. Urban renewal moved my mother out of several places.

"It wasn't bad being a kid in the South End fifteen or so years ago; it really wasn't, it was nice. One thing the South End had before that it doesn't have now is that before, everybody was poor; there was poor Syrians, poor Chinese, poor Irish, poor blacks, poor Greeks, and poor Puerto Ricans. We were the new minority coming in. There was a little bit of everything. And, believe it or not, we used to get together to defend our turf, defend our territory. We were all poor. We all had something in common. We had our little skirmishes here and there, among ourselves, but when it came down to defend our territory, we defend it to the last. We had a good group.

"In the old Castle Square neighborhood, everybody got along together. There was never any racial trouble. Everybody was friends. We all went to school together. I had a lot of Chinese friends. I had a special friend from school who had the same first name as me and I used to go to his house and eat Chinese food and he used to come to my house and have Spanish rice. So it was really nice growing up there.

*One of the many
storefront social clubs
in the South End*



“There is an important difference, though, between being migrant and an immigrant. When they come here Puerto Ricans, they don’t immigrate, they migrate, simply because they are citizens. A lot of American employers brought Puerto Ricans over here because they were cheap labor, but they didn’t give them steady jobs. So on the whole the Puerto Ricans coming into Boston are much poorer than other groups.

“When Puerto Ricans first started coming to the South End in large numbers during the sixties, the main problem was economic. Unemployment is still a big problem among our people but housing has become even more important because of urban renewal and the changes that came with it. So many things have happened to us since we came here.”

Now a resident of the South End for a decade, VICTOR FELICIANO has experienced all the difficulties Spanish speak-

ing people face in Boston. In his short time in the South End, Victor has been involved in a number of efforts to improve housing for Puerto Ricans. He now devotes all of his time to the housing problem:

“I came from a very poor town in Puerto Rico in 1964. I came here in the hope of getting a better life. When I came to the South End there weren’t very many Spanish speaking people here. And that was really a problem because my English was terrible when I came here.

“Unemployment and education were serious problems, when I came to the South End ten years ago, but housing was the worst problem as it is today. At first we were living on West Newton Street with thirteen staying in a two-bedroom place. The apartment was terrible. There wasn’t hardly any hot water and there weren’t any storm windows. You could really see through holes in the walls. We used to go to the landlord and ask him to do repairs and the answer he al-

ways gave was, 'You can go live somewhere else if you don't like it.'

"This continued until 1967 when I went to work for the Emergency Tenants Council. ETC did most of its work in public housing, but they took actions against private landlords too. When I was a tenant here on West Newton Street in 1967, the apartment I was living in was in very bad shape. The landlord didn't want to fix anything. So I went to talk to the tenants. As a matter of fact, the tenants really came to me after I started talking to my family about the terrible conditions. My mother lived on the first floor and my sister on the second. And so I told them, 'Look, there must be something we can do.'

"And so the landlord took me to court, just because I was talking to the tenants. He said I was a troublemaker, because the first thing I told the tenants was, 'Let's not pay any rent 'til he fixes our apartment.' So we went to court and I lost the case in the Municipal Court. So ETC raised up the money and we went over to Superior Court and we presented my case. It took three days for the jury to come up with an answer, and finally they came up and said, 'Yeah, the tenant is in the right.'

"So, as a result they passed what they call the Retaliatory Eviction Law, that no landlord can evict you because you are organizing tenants in his building. So my landlord lost the case. He lost the back rent I owed him. And he had to pay me \$500 for my winning the case. So then he had to fix up the apartment, and, as soon as he fixed up the apartment, I moved out. I said, 'Okay, you can have your apartment now.' And he was really mad.

"There were also collective actions like the one here on West Newton Street when many tenants withheld their rent. The landlord who owned the whole development was completely hysterical about it. He was taken to court many times because he didn't want to put any heat on. The excuse he gave the judge was

that he wasn't collecting any rent. But, by law, you have to give heat whether you're collecting rent or not.

"We had many demonstrations against the landlord who owned this block, and finally he gave it up. He gave the whole block to tenants. There were two tenant councils working then; we were working with people from the black community. And soon we got a bill signed so that we could rehab these buildings on West Newton Street for poor families. So now Emergency Tenants Council has rehabbed 106 units of housing for poor families on this street. ETC has also put up a new development for the elderly.

"So since I've been working for the Emergency Tenants Council, I've seen some changes in the South End, but we still have a problem in the housing situation. When the urban renewal plan was declared for the South End, we saw that the BRA was going to give the area where we were living to commercial use. People began to feel that a little pressure might change the plan. That's how ETC got started.

"We went house-to-house to organize and sometimes people slammed doors in our faces. They were afraid. Then we started block meetings and opened an office so people could come and talk to us about what was going to happen. Then we got involved in planning for the area, and finally in 1969, ETC was named as the developer for this area. The BRA would buy the land, demolish the buildings, take care of relocation, turn over the land to us and we would develop it.

"So we started moving people off West Newton Street, but we told them they would have first priority to come back here to the South End. We couldn't get enough money to build the big units we wanted, so some of them couldn't come back; they're still waiting. But many of the other people who left are here in the new project now, which is very different than what happened down in Castle Square and other projects.

"When I first came here, there was a lot of racism; it's part of our national history here in Boston. Even

now I'm still scared to go into some parts of the city, but in the South End I feel like I'm in Puerto Rico. In the ten years I've lived here more of my people have come and it's like they took over this part of the South End. Everywhere you go around here you see Spanish families, and many say they will never go back to Puerto Rico because they seem to feel that this is their place. Like me, they feel like this is their home."

CHRIS HAYES, *whose easy, West-of-Ireland handsomeness is somehow enhanced by his milkman's uniform, never moved out of the neighborhood in which he was born. He and his wife, CLAIRE, a petite, gracefully expressive woman, decided not to follow their childhood friends to the suburbs, but to bring up their own children in what they had experienced as a healthy urban environment. As Mrs. Hayes explains, "I guess I never really thought about leaving. I was seeing everybody and when they came back they'd say, 'Are you still here?' but that never really affected me."* The Hayeses live in a West Canton Street bowfront which they have fashioned to their comfortable lifestyle and artistic tastes. They hope that the future of the South End will continue to include the "middle ground—the family type of person that we are and we hope will stay here."

MR. HAYES: "My father and mother were both born and brought up in Ireland, and came over in around 1926. They found in the South End, I think, all of the things that they had been hoping for. Freedom, lack of oppression, plus an opportunity for a job and an opportunity to mix. They came here and they found a whole variety, black and white, and all different nationalities.

"I've lived on this street over thirty years. We've been no more than on a three-block area. And Claire's people have lived in the same house since . . ."

MRS. HAYES: "Around 1915, I suppose. My mother was two, and she's sixty now. My grandparents moved here in the early 1900s and moved into the South End because there was a pocket of Slavic people here who could speak the language."

MR. HAYES: "There's always been, at least in my memory, a sizeable Greek, Syrian, Lebanese and Armenian community. There were also a very large group of people by way of Canada: Scotch, English, and French Canadians. There were two Scotch (Presbyterian) churches here, which have since gone."

MRS. HAYES: "The New York streets area—where the Herald Traveler building is—must have been a very strong Jewish neighborhood at one time. When I was growing up there were still some very vibrant Jewish businesses there. There was a huge food store and one of the major Jewish bakeries stayed there until demolition forced them to move, right on the corner of Harrison Avenue and Dover Street. And there was a delicatessen on the same block of the next corner. And then Harry Lang Kosher Meat Market was there. One thing that's missing now that used to exist here was a fairly vibrant shopping area all along Washington Street. Lots of churches have gone—well, the congregations left too. Every church had its annual outing. And almost any group that remained ethnically intact had social festivities generated from the church groups.

"Lots of people ran boarding houses. My mother had a boarding house, my grandmother had a boarding house. That, I guess, is a fairly easy way for a family to make extra money. In many cases, boarding houses were run along strictly ethnic lines. And quite often boarders would come almost straight from the boat to live in a boarding house until they got established."

MR. HAYES: "In some cases, it was just survival together. I know in my father's house at one time, there was something like fourteen or fifteen people, and there was only one person working, and they were all sharing from that.

"As a very young kid playing here and dealing with people here—even though we were in the Depression, I didn't realize it. There were an awful lot of people



*South End children
during the Depression*

that would take the time to talk to you. Despite the fact that maybe two or three or ten would be out of work, it was still vibrant.

"There was always a very positive approach to this community from my parents. My father and mother totally enjoyed this community. They knew what was around. They knew that with a short walk, they were up near the Charles River. They knew they had the Common and the Garden. They knew that a short ride brought them intown to anything intown. They had museums. They had schools that we were very close to. Every Sunday—the short ride to Franklin Park was something we did 500 times. We went down to City Point, I couldn't tell you how many times. I think the great part of the South End was in many cases you didn't need transportation.

"There was and still is a distinct lack of recreation, programming facilities, directions not only in the South End, but in the whole city. The South End at the time when we were growing up was a very dense-

ly populated community and we didn't have some of the natural things, let's say, that South Boston has. And settlement houses came into that void, stayed in it for quite a few years and have since dropped out, leaving that void, once again in the city.

"There was a feeling of depression in the South End—in the 50s—where nothing was happening. We were getting inundated with barrooms. We had all of the social problems that take place in the middle of the city in a very congested area. People looked at the area as a slum; the papers referred to it as a skid row. There was a very depressed feeling. Every kid that Claire grew up with, that I grew up with, wanted to get out of here. When you got in the service, you never told a guy from the outside that you came from the South End in the city of Boston; you just said, 'I'm from Boston, right near Copley Sqaure,' is the way you'd refer to it."

MRS. HAYES: "Anybody that lived here felt that he was stuck here, trapped here, couldn't get out. And as





John L. Sullivan of the South End, Boston's strong

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Boston enjoys an international reputation as the birthplace of our American Revolution. Today, as the nation celebrates its 200th anniversary, that struggle for freedom again draws attention to Boston. The heritage of Paul Revere, Sam Adams, Faneuil Hall and Bunker Hill still fire our romantic imaginations.

But a heritage is more than a few great names or places—it is a culture, social history and, above all, it is people. Here in Boston, one of our most cherished traditions is a rich and varied neighborhood life. The history of our neighborhood communities is a fascinating and genuinely American story—a story of proud and ancient peoples and customs, preserved and at the same time transformed by the American urban experience.

So to celebrate our nation's birthday we have undertaken to chronicle Boston's neighborhood histories. Compiled largely from the oral accounts of living Bostonians, these histories capture in vivid detail the breadth and depth and depth of our city's complex past. They remind us of the most important component of Boston's heritage—people, which is, after all, what the Bicentennial is all about.

KEVIN H. WHITE



Boston 200™









